

Clara Barton School  
Bordentown, Burlington County, New Jersey

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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
District of New Jersey

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Seymour Williams, A.I.A., District Officer  
133 Central Avenue, Rahway, New Jersey

Clara Barton School  
Bordentown, Burlington County, New Jersey

Owner: State Board of Education

Date of Erection: 1838 (Date stone)

Architect:

Builder:

Present Condition: Good; restored by the school  
children of New Jersey

Number of Stories: One and one-half

Materials of Construction: Foundation - stone

Exterior walls - brick

Interior walls - plaster

Inside brick chimneys

Roof - pitch, shingles

Historical Data:

Clara Barton School formerly stood at the corner of Farnsworth Avenue and West Street. It was moved to its present location, Crosswicks and Burlington Streets, in 1839 to make room for the Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church.

It is claimed that the building was used for school purposes in 1797 and possibly before.

However, the date stone gives the year as 1838. One thing is certain, however, the building was used by a Mr. Moore as a school in 1839-1840. Moore remained one year; the building was used more or less continuously as a school until 1853 when Miss Barton occupied it; she used it one year.

Miss Barton in her memoirs of life at Bordentown writes:

"Something drew me to the State of New Jersey. I was a teacher dyed in the wool, and soon discovered that this good State had no public school, that a part of its children were in private schools, the remainder in the streets. The people said that they were not paupers and would not have their children schooled at public expense, would not send them to 'pauper schools'. I considered this state of things and decided to take upon me the opening of public schools generally in that State as well as the eyes of the people. I went to Bordentown, found two hundred children in school, four hundred on the street. They had public school laws, but not enforced.

"I found the trustees and had them officially announce the opening of a public school in the village of Bordentown, to be taught by a lady at her own expense, if preferred. A house was found and opened, and one bright morning I found myself there with six bright renegade boys (not a girl could be trusted with me) and the public schools were commenced. I understood boys and school teaching was my trade. We got on well and at the end of twelve months I

stood in a new school house which had been built for me at a cost of \$4,000. My six pupils had grown to six hundred, a bright, loving faithful phalanx, among whom never a punishment had been administered. A few years later I found them all over the Southern fields, standing firmly behind their muskets or lying in their blood."

In 1854 she resigned her position and moved to Washington, taking a position in the Patent Office. From there she began her relief work for the war victims and their families after the outbreak of the Civil War. Later she transferred her activity to the battlefields of Europe. She founded the Red Cross as an agency for relief work on May 21, 1881 and was its first president, serving in that capacity until 1905. She died at Glen Echo, Maryland on April 12, 1912.

The Clara Barton School is regarded as one of the first free schools in New Jersey. It was neglected for many years; then in 1920 a local group, under the leadership of Miss M. V. Flynn, undertook the work of preserving it as a memorial. The property was owned by Thomas J. Rattigan who donated it. Pupils and teachers contributed the funds necessary for restoration. The State Commissioner of Education, president of the State Board of Education, and the Burlington County Superintendent of Schools serve as permanent trustees.

The building was dedicated on June 11, 1921. The tablet on the front entrance bears the following legend:

CLARA BARTON SCHOOL-HOUSE

IN THIS BUILDING, FROM 1852 UNTIL 1854,  
CLARA BARTON, THE FOUNDER OF THE AMERICAN  
RED CROSS, TAUGHT SCHOOL

HERE SHE ESTABLISHED ONE OF THE FIRST FREE  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF NEW JERSEY IN 1854

THE BUILDING WAS RESTORED BY THE SCHOOL  
CHILDREN OF THE STATE AND DEDICATED ON  
JUNE 11, 1921.

Bibliography:

Magee, James D. Bordentown 1682-1932  
Bordentown, The Bordentown Register,  
1932

Records searched by George De Cou,  
historian Burlington County Historical  
Society

"Schoolhouse Where Clara Barton Was  
First Teacher" Philadelphia Record  
June 12, 1921

Magee, James D. "1853 - The Clara  
Barton Schoolhouse" The Bordentown  
Register May 27, 1932

Field Book and drawings of survey

*Walter C. Rutt*  
Supervising Historian

Approved:

*Seymour Williams*  
SEYMOUR WILLIAMS, A.I.A.  
District Officer

*Rev. Jan. 25, '37 T.W.*